

Humanities in Small Steps



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Humanities

In Small Steps

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नमो गुरुभ्यः

*I am deeply indebted to
everyone who helped me learn
through
teaching, discussion and argument*

I am very grateful to Dr S Mohan for bearing with my arguments and discussions for more than two decades despite our ideological differences.

This book is an ambitious attempt to extend my earlier effort, science in small steps, to the areas which contemporary society insists are social sciences. I persist with old, some may say archaic word humanities.

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Also by the Author:

The quest for new materials. (Vigyan Prasara 2005)

Experimenting with the quantum world (Vigyan Prasara 2007),

How well do we know it? (Pothis: 2012)

On walking the knife edge of science and religion (Pothis:2012)

An unknown scientist in the ivory tower (Pothis:2015)

The lizard in the ear and forty modern variants (Pothis:2017)

Me and My universe : A conversation (Pothis:2018).

Vaarana (A novel) (Pothis:2018)

Science in small steps (Pothis:2020)

chinni adugulalo aadhunika vignanam { Science in small steps :

Telugu version (Pothis:2021)}

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I Why the archaic word

Economics, politics and related subjects are actually better described by the old archaic word "humanities" rather than the modern word "Social Sciences". These subjects are our attempts to understand the relationships between human beings. Observing humans and using logic to understand them is as ancient as our observing the movement of planets in the sky and developing astronomy. Writings, some more than two thousand years old and from many different cultures, discuss economics, politics, aesthetics and so on.

However, there is a problem with the use of logic and language. Human language is far superior to that of any other living being. But, the meaning of a word is only another word. Even when a word refers to a physical object there can be some confusion. For example, a piece of rock that fits in a human hand and a diamond in the ring are both called stones! These limitations become extremely important when the words refer to human actions, ideas and emotions. No word used by any philosopher will have any easily understood meaning. And most philosophers, ancient or modern, know that using simple language exposes the weakness of philosophy. So most writings on these subjects, ancient as well as modern, are anything but easy to understand.

The scientific method has been very successful in the study of the natural world. This progress was achieved by carefully relating the important words and concepts to the outcome of specific

experiments or observations. For example, "force" in physics is precisely the rate at which "momentum" changes. Momentum is the product of the mass and velocity of the object. Velocity is the rate at which the position of the object in a particular direction changes. The most visible aspects of science are quantification and experimentation. In science the uncertainty in the numerical values are also well defined. Fundamental physics provides a core strength. For example, while biology is not determined by physics, nothing in biology can violate laws of physics.

Inspired by the success of "scientific enquiry" in understanding nature, something similar has been attempted in humanities and thus the newer name, "social science" was born. Social scientists have incorporated quantification and experimentation in their work. However, as shall be clear as we go along, applied to humanities, the scientific methods of quantification and experimentation are often much less useful than human language.

To guess why is easy. The whole of the universe, including all human beings are made of atoms of a hundred different elements. The atoms are incredibly small. There are a million times more atoms in a drop of water than the total number of humans on the planet earth. More importantly all atoms of a given element, wherever they are in the universe are identical. Their properties do not change wherever the atoms are. Properties of atoms will not change with time. Atoms in a living human being will not violate laws of physics. But no two living organisms are identical. There are differences in the number of atoms and how they form bonds with one another. The living organisms also change when the environment around them changes.

Using words in the ancient tradition while being consciously aware of their limitations is the means employed here to "understand humanities".

II Living : Not Understanding

The present simple overview of humanities seeks only to “subjectively highlight” the irresolvable dilemmas associated with “living” in the contemporary world. The society of today is dominated by technology. For the last three hundred years humans have begun to use experimental verification as the proof of any scientific theory. This has led to a tremendous advance in physical sciences. As a result, human technology has improved and contemporary society offers a tremendous variety of new technological goods and services, each of which have a “cost” or monetary value. Technology has also enabled individuals to “buy in the marketplace” goods and services which were earlier “available” only from members of the family, group or society and often without any direct exchange of money. Eating food in a restaurant and paying for it instead of eating food cooked by members of the family is an obvious and very simple example. Technology also enables people with severe physical handicaps to move around independently, work and earn money.

This progress has led to one stream of human thought which argues for “independence of the individual”. In this view, a human being is an independent entity who can exchange his “personal effort” for “whatever his heart desires” in the technological market place. Without advanced technology however, this “independence” would not be attractive. In the earlier era, only mendicants and ascetics were able to survive in isolation and that only if the climate was not too harsh. The second stream of hu-

man thought has also been influenced by the same technological progress. When even the most severely handicapped individuals can be helped by technology, why are large numbers of humans not benefitted? Once again, without technology, this is not a very important question. Throughout history, the small surplus if any available with individuals was forcibly taken away by the “rulers” and used for wars or showing off their greatness by building monuments. But that really did not give the “rulers” any “better life” than the common man. The Mughal emperor Shah Jahan could build the Taj Mahal as a grand burial place for his favourite queen. But she died in childbirth because they did not have reliable contraceptives and the available medical knowledge was very poor. The Egyptian pharaohs could keep tons of gold in their burial chambers for their use in the after life but the mummies show teeth ground to the jaw due to too much grit in the wheat flour. Only the products of modern advanced technology are worth sharing.

The proponents of the second view argue that the technological marketplace gives too much “power” to a small number of people who have money and prevent the rest from enjoying the benefits of technology. So, liberty and independence are not possible unless this excess “power” is taken away. The first group holds that the exchange in the market is “voluntary”; that individuals would voluntarily help the disadvantaged and that advanced technological societies are impossible without markets. The second group counters that the exchange in a market is only apparently voluntary, that compassion means the receiver is a beggar and compassion in any case will not create equality. This conflict between those who look at “property as a necessary right

of the individual for a technological society which the rest should not take away” and those who hold that “all property is theft” cannot be avoided. "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I?" This is an ancient philosophical and religious dilemma. There has never been any answer acceptable to everyone. However, neither the fundamental rights of an individual to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness nor the desire to create a world without misery, where everyone shares equally the benefits of technology are possible without the products of modern technology.

III Learning from the squirrel

The present human society of some seven billion people cannot even exist without advanced technology to produce food and other basic necessities. Squirrels living in areas where winter temperatures are low and there is snow on the ground bury nuts. Surprisingly this behaviour offers a great example for understanding the true nature of technology.

The squirrel in common with all living organisms would only survive if it eats and reproduces. A squirrel stores nuts to provide for the winter months when food will not be easily available due to snowfall. Storing helps the squirrel survive in the long run. A squirrel that stores too little will not survive winter. A squirrel that concentrates only on storing nuts will not be able to find a mate and reproduce. So it will not have babies and so squirrels of this type will not survive either. Squirrels that balance the two behaviours are the ones that survive. This is the basis of natural selection. Obviously both the behaviours are “innate”. A squirrel unlike a human cannot “understand” why. But squirrels that have an innate unhealthy tendency to concentrate on storing for the winter or ignoring it altogether will not survive.

The story of technology necessary for human comfort is similar. Technology must be retained for future use. Some part of the technological output should be used for maintaining and if possible improving the technology. This is more important than everyone equally sharing the products of technology. Technology has to exist before the fruits are produced for sharing.

This limitation is valid even if the technology is not very advanced. We know that some ancient tribal societies had “lost” the technological skills of their ancestors. This usually occurred when the human population decreased due to natural calamities. The number of individuals available to “invest” time and energy and maintain the technological skills was insufficient for the society as a whole to retain the technological skills. The balance between investment for the future and consumption for the present is required for any human society just like the balance between storing for winter and finding a mate for the squirrel. Despite all the hype about the mathematical calculations that are employed by economic science, it is not possible to “find” this balance.

As an example, a manufacturer of cars can undertake any number of “studies” about the preferences of the buyers and “evaluate” available technologies. But it is common to see some models offered by the same manufacturer succeed and others fail, though the expertise employed for design and development is obviously the same. The expertise COULD NOT give conclusive answers. When a new commercial enterprise is started, it always suffers losses for some time. How much loss has to be borne and for how long cannot be known in advance. Obviously, the larger entities who can wait longer for a return have an advantage. They are said to have deeper pockets. They can bear losses for a longer period, and then claim credit for the eventual turn around.

An infinitely deep pocket however, such as due to common ownership of all economic investment would support all failures

indefinitely and there would be no weeding out of failures. This is why common ownership of all investment is bound to fail. We shall discuss the details of this indefinite support extensively in later sections.

The "new communist" ideas like local worker ownership, co-operative ownership etc. will be no more successful than the earlier attempts at government ownership. While the worker in a failed commercial entity loses his job, one in an entity with worker ownership loses both the job and the savings which would have sustained him after retirement. The internet and knowledge economy cannot also solve the dilemma. The uncertainty exists even in the smallest shops and workshops. A way of avoiding all failures is beyond human capabilities. Just as survival of the squirrel is the only proof of the proper balance, a flourishing economy is the only proof of the society finding the proper balance between failures and successes.

The balance between the demand for immediate benefits (wages) and long term benefits (profits) is necessary and any system trying to avoid this would not succeed. We shall examine some reasons why trying to find this balance is very unpopular. Failures may or may not be the stepping stones for individual success but they are a regrettably essential indicator of a flexible and viable economic system.

IV Time, cost and value in economics

The time required for making a commercial undertaking profitable, the time for which it would stay profitable and the time when it would become a lost cause to be abandoned are all entirely unknown and unknowable. This is as true of the multinational company starting a unit with best management and economics experts as for the neighbourhood shop or even a workman buying a personal set of tools and hiring out as a workman. The birth, sustenance and eventual demise of a commercial undertaking obviously depends on individual acts of selling and buying. Each such act includes a monetary exchange or cost. But as everyone who has actually tried any commercial activity knows, trying to make profit on each and every transaction is a stupid long term policy. Sometimes it makes sense to sell at a lower price. Sometimes to make a large profit. Sometimes it is not even clear if a particular transaction is profitable or not. Each action is a gamble and the long term consequences are completely unknown.

But taking a gamble, a necessary part of economic activity has to be distinguished from actual gambling. The difference is determined by time. Any economic activity takes a certain amount of time. There is the time interval between a shopkeeper procuring groceries and being able to sell them. Investing time and effort or money for the corresponding interval of time is taking a gamble. A manufacturer of cars takes a big gamble in introducing a new model. It takes a year or more to do so and it takes a bit longer to

know if the gamble has paid off. A workman takes a gamble by investing in a set of better tools but would know if it results in earning more only after some time.

Buying and selling after a very short time interval however is pure gambling. The real investor is one who waits for the time required for the anticipated economic activity to actually take place. The one who buys and sells without waiting is a gambler. Encouraging the investor while restraining the gambler is great in principle but as will become clear, it is not practical.

Using a currency value or cost is convenient and necessary for every commercial transaction. The cost is simply a number. And it is the most misused number in the world. Because goods and services in the market come with a price tag, a number, experts apply rules of arithmetic or statistics on the number. But a price tag is just an indicator for a buyer and has no relationship whatsoever with either the next cost at which the next real transaction takes place or the value or utility of the goods or services being exchanged for money.

A million people in a country may be owning houses, each costing at a given time, a million in the local currency. Multiplying those two numbers gives a new meaningless number. One thousand billion currency units, the number obtained by multiplying the two is an imaginary number. Not more than 1-2% of the houses would get sold during one year. Any attempt to forcibly sell more will reduce the unit price, quite often drastically. So what is the number supposed to represent? Nothing! It is a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Economists argue, quite logically, that no one knows the cost of even such a commonplace object as a pencil and that only a market exchange determines the price. A corollary is essential. Even the market price does not define the price at which the next sale will take place. The seller may be desperate and willing to sell at a much lower price. Or he may be willing to offer a discount, hoping to get a profit on future transactions. Or he may expect scarcity and hold on for a higher price. The buyer may be willing to pay more because he has no time to bargain. The transaction once completed may change future market prices. For example, if a number of houses are sold at a lower price, the market price would decrease. But the cost is only an indicator for the next sale. And the very fact that a particular item or service is exchanged at a particular price implies that there are members of the society who were either not willing to pay that cost or unable to pay that cost and consequently do not have access to that particular item or service. This is another important characteristic of a market but it is never emphasised.

Everything bought or sold has a value, in addition to the numerical cost. The buyer is willing to pay the cost of buying or renting a house because it has a utility or value for him. A three bedroom house is useful for a single family. It cannot be easily divided into smaller units for the use by multiple families. The utility of a hostel where single rooms are rented is different. That of a hotel, where single rooms are rented for a few days is different from all of the above. Once again, the utility of all the places of stay in the country, taken together is a meaningless idea. Even more importantly, the utility cannot be quantified, even when we

compare accommodation of the same type. One can prepare elaborate check lists of the advantages and disadvantages like the size, locality, accessibility, and so on. But the utility cannot become a number so that the utility of two houses compared, no matter how elaborate the list and how much we try. It is a matter of everyday experience that making the list more and more elaborate is counterproductive. The individual is very aware of the time and effort spent in the process of evaluation as well as the inconvenience caused by the delay in buying or renting the house. Individuals make their decisions despite these limitations. Once a choice is made they will justify their choice often using numbers. While a house was chosen as an example, this logic holds for everything that can be bought or sold in the marketplace.

To summarise, everything in the marketplace has a cost, a number that has a meaning only as an indicator for planning the next purchase. Time cannot be measured in economics. That is the fundamental difference between physics and economics. The exchange of money and things (or services) in the marketplace may be voluntary (or constrained by circumstances as a socialist would emphasise) but the decision to undertake the exchange at a specific price can never be justified by logic.

Everything exchanged for a cost has a "value" which is qualitative. The advantages and disadvantages associated with this value can be listed but cannot be combined to get a "number" for comparison. Finally, despite protestations to the contrary, the advantages and disadvantages are logically described only to justify the choice after it has been made.

A flourishing economy demands that people take a gamble not that they gamble. Cost is a number with limited meaning. Mathematical gymnastics of economic theory with that number will not lead to superior rules for a flourishing economy. Common-sense is necessary and also sufficient.

V Value: To the individual and to the society

We will discuss here only the "value" of goods and services available at a "cost" in a technological society. Other values of a human society will be discussed later. Value of items being purchased is specific to the buyer. The individual takes a gamble not only while investing for the future but even when buying something for immediate consumption. The value of the item purchased is only vaguely guessed before purchase. The item may not give the anticipated satisfaction when used. It was an individual decision to undertake the commercial transaction and the losses and disappointments if any have to be borne only by the individual. But there are several reasons why the commercial transaction of individual purchasers could become a value or a matter of concern to society.

The existence of a market price of an item shows that some members of the society "choose" not to pay that price for the item and prefer getting along without it. Some others may need the item very badly but cannot afford it. Quite a large segment of the society may value the universal availability of some goods and services and refuse to accept a situation of someone in the society being unable to afford to buy them. Food, shelter, education and healthcare are the most important examples. The last two are particularly sensitive issues. It is one thing to shrug and accept some people eating exotic fruits and others only rice and beans. It may not hurt "too much" to find huts and mansions in

the same country. At the end of the day, everyone is aware that the utility value of most luxuries is purely psychological. But education and health care becoming commercial becomes an irritation for many. Shorn of all the philosophical rigmarole, education is the acquisition of superior skills that would enable the individual to eventually earn more money. Clearly, the rich people can offer to pay more for educational services and this would enable the next generation to earn more and perpetuate the advantage of birth in a rich family. The situation with health care is even more complicated and contentious. Health is a primary requirement for acquiring skills and earning money. Health is also an issue for which the old proverb "a stitch in time saves nine" applies with vengeance. Simple precautions on the part of individuals and simple medical treatment at the early stage could reduce the need for sophisticated and costly medical services in the future. Thus, argue many, their availability must not be commercial.

Even the idea of medical insurance is unjustifiable. If a car is not maintained properly and meets with an accident, the insurance company will not pay. But there is no way to know what proper maintenance is for a human body. An early diagnosis not only helps the patient, it saves money for the insurer. A bad car repair can be corrected. Not so for medical damage. You can write off a car not a human. It is easy to add to the list.

Often this argument is extended to other goods and services. Many in the society regard certain goods and services as ostentatious or wasteful expenditures. Luxuries being available commercially implies a competition for investment between

production of essential and luxury goods. There is an obvious component of hypocrisy in this complaint. Everyone complains about the wasteful expenditure of those richer than themselves. One who buys a car complains about the one who buys a helicopter but resents the claim of a cyclist that a car itself is a wasteful luxury. There is also an unwillingness to accept logic. The sum of the cost of luxury goods sold in society is, as discussed earlier, an imaginary number and not wealth that can be shared. However these issues are ignored by those condemning luxuries.

Externalities are other arguments against commercial transactions. In the section entitled "Learning from the squirrel" it was said that failures are a regrettably essential indicator of a viable economic system. But failure of a commercial undertaking not only causes investors to lose their investment, but renders other individuals jobless. Not all of them may be able to find alternative employment immediately. Sometimes they may need to acquire new skills to get jobs. Some of them may not be capable of acquiring new skills and finding a job. So the society may see a "collective value" in restricting, controlling or even preventing many commercial transactions to protect "livelihoods". Ironically this argument could be used to oppose banning luxuries since for some people, providing luxuries is the livelihood.

Similarly, every human activity will consume energy, use natural resources and generate waste and pollution which affect all individuals in the society. For many people, this is a huge unaccounted externality in commercial activity. Should society direct investment into specific areas and prevent investment in others?

Can society do it? If so, at what cost? We will return to this complex issue later.

All in all, justifying societal concerns about total reliance on private commercial transactions is very easy. To control the cost or availability of commercial items is a collective value. Worshipping values and dismissing commercial activities as inferior is a very common emotional response of large sections of humans but it must be resisted. It is necessary to ensure that the quest for societal values does not derail the technological economy. As mentioned earlier, without technology, there is nothing to share. Without private commercial activity there is no technological economy. The highest values in society need technological products for their actualization. As an example, in the ancient pure agrarian societies, cooking and cleaning involved so much physical labour that the mother had much less opportunity to express her love for the newborn infant than most mothers in a modern advanced society.

Just as an individual takes a gamble with both investment and consumption decisions, a society has to take a gamble while trying to control commerce in order to achieve the societal goals. In both cases satisfaction and success is not guaranteed. But there are important differences. Cost is at the very least approximately known in most individual commercial transactions. The cost of achieving the desired societal values cannot even be guessed precisely. Estimates are offered but these are only mathematical gymnastics and cannot be trusted.

More importantly, an individual plans an investment or purchase only when the required assets or money are available. The indi-

vidual also accepts failure of an investment or abandons purchases that have not given the expected value. Members of a society, collectively, most often refuse to concede limits to financial resources. They believe that the society has infinitely deep pockets or should appropriate the wealth of the rich class as necessary. This lack of a clear limit to expenditure is very similar to the problem of government owned commercial units discussed earlier. Public will also refuse to abandon the quest for a societal goal. The failure to achieve societal goals will be attributed to limited resources rather than the practicability of values and programs. The true nature of cost, time and value as outlined earlier is quite often not accepted by the public. Thus, it is important to rationally evaluate how far these societal goals and values can be practically realised.

VI An anthill or a pride of lions?

How can humans best maintain a technological society which ensures creation of goods and services to cater to individualist and societal values? We shall continue the discussion within the framework outlined earlier. Technological production has to exist before we can consider the value of the production to either the individual or the society. Also a technological society cannot exist without entrusting investment decisions to private hands.

As with the example of the squirrel, other living beings offer examples to illuminate the discussion. Societies of some species of ants are very complex. There are ants which work as farmers, scavengers, warriors etc. to maintain the anthill which will be a million times larger than the ant in size. But there is no police force. Because of their genes, ants work hard and conscientiously, without either supervision or policing. In a pride of lions on the other hand, there is a prime male who enforces discipline. He protects the pride but reserves for himself the right to breed. It fights with juvenile usurpers when they try to challenge him. In order to have superior strength, he gets the lion's share of the kill.

Human organisation throughout known history resembles a pride of lions rather than an anthill. And the reason again is genetic. Humans are not genetically programmed to act for the benefit of the collective. Marx's quest for an egalitarian heaven on earth is the most sophisticated form of the highly popular "antwisch";

wishing that human society was anthill-like. Marx recognized that in addition to individuals being responsible for investment decisions, differences in remuneration received by workers with different skills is an impediment to his social utopia. He thus invoked, one dare not say prayed, for the evolution of a new consciousness that would make the individual happy to receive equal remuneration for both skilled and unskilled labour. Mendelian genetics showed this was impossible. It simply says changes in conditions under which animals live cannot alter the nature of the next generation. Marxists, till they made peace with this science were as furious with genetics as the catholic church in the sixteenth century was with heliocentrism, the idea that planets and earth revolve around the sun.

Without an authority with coercive powers neither a technological society nor achieving collective values is possible. This coercive authority is what we more commonly call a government. The coercive power of a government is however a cause of concern. Though it is called the coercive power of the government, the power is actually wielded by individuals in the name of the government. They could misuse the powers, very much like the lion reserving for himself the right to breed. In the lion's case, there is a genetic benefit, since the prime male is the strongest and the next generation inherits the traits. There is no such advantage in the enforcers of government power cornering benefits.

Some people dream that voluntary agreements in the market, without either a government or its coercive power can sustain a technological society. They insist that individuals buy goods and

services only if they value them and government interference in the name of societal values is both unjustified and unnecessary. However, an advanced technological society can only exist when there are a large number of individuals capable of providing a large number of highly skilled services. Number of voluntary agreements needed between every pair of individual sellers and purchasers of these large number of services will become astronomical. So this "anarcho-capitalism" is clearly impractical and thus ignored in this discussion.

Some others concede that a government with coercive power is necessary but insist that a government should not use its coercive power to deliver collective values identified above. They wish for a government that merely runs an army to prevent external aggression, a judiciary to enforce commercial contracts and a police force to enforce judicial orders. This group too wants the government to ignore societal concerns. The availability of resources for maintaining existing technology and improving it further are clearly maximised in this plan. Advanced technology can flourish under such a "libertarian" governance since the availability of investment is the maximum. As we shall see, chances of such a government coming into being are very low. Except for the supporters of the two ideas mentioned above, everyone supports collective societal goals as described in the earlier section. Naturally, most governments seen in history and in the contemporary world claim that societal values should be the first priority rather than ensuring private investment.

The conflict between individual and societal values is a mirror image of the conflict between immediate consumption and in-

vestment for the future identified earlier. Promises of improved technology providing long term benefits for everyone will not suffice for many people to support laws and regulations required to protect and encourage private investment. Individual discipline is required to put off immediate consumption and pleasure and invest for potential future benefits. It is difficult enough when the individual expects future benefits personally. The problem with societal policies as outlined earlier is that the potential benefits are claimed accrue to society at large. In the case of a societal value like universal care, every individual can see a potential future benefit very much like an insurance policy. But, when investment surplus is left in private hands, only investors and actually only some of them will be seen to be successful. This will be a major disincentive for the society to support policies necessary for a technological economy.

As discussed in the previous section, societal values are the free provision of certain goods and services, restriction of other commercial transactions because of externalities like environmental responsibility or protection of vulnerable livelihoods. It is possible and mostly necessary to view the cost of these as a necessity for the implementation of laws protecting private investment. But even this restriction of financial resources for social spending is rarely accepted, let alone the dream of eliminating this totally as the libertarians want.

The libertarians and anarcho-capitalists argue that societal values are easily taken care of by private charity and that these measures discourage self-reliance and cultivate dependency. But in advanced technological societies, individuals are mobile and ob-

tain many things through commercial transactions rather than societal relationships. Social networking required to access private charity will be absent. This is apart from claims of charity being demeaning to the receiver.

Government freebies would encourage some to be lazy and dependent but others to take more risks and strive harder. A few mountaineers may prefer the challenge of rock climbing without safety gear but many others may perhaps strive harder, secure in the confidence of its existence.

It is sensible at this point to discuss how various types of governance have actually fared in using coercive power, encouraging advanced technology and achieving societal goals. Since we were talking about cost and value earlier, it is natural to ask; what the cost of governance is and how it relates to the value provided.

VII Coercion? Certainly! Progress? Rarely!

The human society we said resembles the pride of lions. However, humans are not genetically programmed like the juveniles to accept fighting for breeding rights as the ultimate goal in life. So given an opportunity the human treads an independent path. There is no society without coercion. A tribal society is a very egalitarian society. But the survival of an individual who leaves the tribe is not certain. Any individual who survives has a much worse life. That too is coercion. A modern tribal who has some commercializable skill tends to leave the tribe. The family always operates on the principle of "to each according to necessity, from each according to ability". But families began to disintegrate once individuals could buy the necessities in the market and religion or society no longer had coercive powers. Combined families began to unravel when many individuals began to earn in the commercial marketplace. The various attempts at forming small egalitarian communes collapse sooner or later because the group does not have any power to prevent individuals from leaving the commune. On a large scale the Soviet Union unravelled when Gorbachev declined to maintain the iron curtain and prevent citizens from escaping.

Any society that desires the comforts of modern technology has to balance encouraging investment by private individuals for the future and expenditure for catering to social values. There are no rules for specifying this balance and a society can only find the

optimum by trial and error. Private investment inevitably increases inequalities and the society has to be ready to ignore this. Encouraging private investment limits the resources available for satisfying social values and so the demands have to be prioritised.

A government that rules with an iron hand and enforces rules appears to be a very attractive option to achieve this. However, as mentioned earlier, few individuals, acting as agents of the government and forcing the rest of the individuals to obey are the iron hand of the government. The "iron hand" needs agents of the government to be willing to use force as required by law and not bypass the rules through corruption. They more importantly should not use the power to settle personal vendettas. For this, a regimented, hierarchical group is very useful. Stronger the commitment of such a group to the government, more the force it is willing to use in support of the government. Unfortunately, the policies imposed by this iron hand will be mostly unsuitable for a technologically advanced society. The emphasis on long term investment with the attendant inequality and the demand on individuals to take risks and ignore failures will not suit a hierarchical group. So these policies not only cannot emerge by voluntary association, they cannot usually be the sole driving force for any dictatorial government.

The hierarchical group and the government it supports may be interested only in power and seizing the surplus available with the common people for their personal luxuries. This was the basis of the ancient feudal societies. Another group may view itself as the sword of God almighty. In this case the government

would become a theocracy. The communists are a group in the modern era, who believe that they are contributing to the revolution of the proletariat as foreseen by dialectic materialism. In the latter two cases, coercion is justified as a requirement for the achievement of a great goal. Human suffering of today is ignored as irrelevant or justified as a necessary contribution to future universal happiness of all humans, either in an egalitarian heaven on earth or eternal heaven hereafter. Stronger the commitment of the core group to the cause, stronger the iron hand.

A strongly committed group is absolutely convinced of its ideology. So, failure cannot be a fault of its ideology, only of improper implementation. So, after every failure, the ideology is enforced with renewed vigour and more force. This often leads to huge catastrophes. The catastrophic events are not directly related to the nature of the ideology that binds the regimented group. It is in the very nature of such a commitment. A catastrophe is an inevitable final stage of a government drawing its strength from the strong commitment of a hierarchical group. But as in economics, time is not quantified. No one can predict if these catastrophes will emerge after months, years or decades.

Most hierarchical groups will be more or less hostile to the economic policies required for an advanced technological economy. Of the examples mentioned above, the feudal aristocracy wouldn't like the success of individual commercial entrepreneurs who may obey the government but would not respect the hierarchy. Religion wouldn't regard success in the world to be a worthy goal. Communists hate economic inequalities and strongly object to the market as the controller.

There are however a few examples of successful technological societies where the government ruled with an iron hand and achieved rapid technological progress. European societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are one example while contemporary communist China is another. In these societies, established hierarchical groups adjusted with the economic requirements needed by the technological society. The aristocracy and churches of 17th and 18th century Europe introduced laws and regulations that favoured the then emerging technological economy. The communist party of China has made peace with the market over the last few decades. The rapid growth in both cases was really the result of prioritising investment over immediate consumption. The old European societies did not bother about government support for the poor. Debtors were imprisoned and punishments were very severe. The poor were coerced into accepting the situation both by the law and the church. The Chinese workers in the nominally "private" concerns today are being ruled with an iron hand in "national interest" while others are prevented from migrating to the cities. These coercive methods are not available to most contemporary countries.

Democracy is the form of government not discussed above. Ideally the power to impose rules and discipline lawbreakers is derived from the consent of all citizens. In practice, democracy may not live up to this ideal. But, even the democratic majority will not be very receptive to the economic rules required for a technological society. The voting public in a democracy are only logical in electing a government that promises to cater to the social value of providing more free goods and services for immedi-

ate consumption. When economic production stagnates or decreases, investment has to be enhanced. But a democratic majority would demand more support for immediate consumption precisely at that instance. As usual, everyone wants someone else to reduce consumption.

The existence of a strong group "rationally aware" of the investment consumption dilemma is essential in a democracy. In its absence, spending for societal values will not be an inducement to make the economic policies required by the technological society acceptable to a majority but a sacred ideology. Such democracies, very much like hierarchical dictatorships, will double down on the policies which reduce investment sometimes resulting in catastrophic failures.

Most non-communist democracies cannot and do not use extreme force to make citizens obey the laws. People naturally take advantage of the leniency and hide wealth creating what is popularly called a black market or a parallel economy. This evidence of cheating makes people even more reluctant to reverse the economic policies. Eliminating the black economy, it would be argued, could create an egalitarian society, without subjecting the general public to an iron rule of dictatorship. It is difficult to convince people that the black economy is the consequence of the economic path chosen. Black Markets exist even in communist states, despite severe punishments imposed by the government. Despite limitations, a democracy is better than any other system of government, even if emotional support for a group, caste, community etc. becomes the criterion for democratic choice. At the very least, the periodic elections allow peaceful transfer of power and reduce the chance of catastrophes.

However, if the lessons of economics outlined earlier do not convince at least a significant minority, changes in elected democratic governments do not significantly change the rules in favour of long term private investment. Frustrated by the consequent slow economic growth, people sometimes renounce democracy and accept a dictatorship, thereby jumping from the frying pan into fire.

The risk to democracy from the frustration of unmet economic aspirations is smaller than that due to the dominance of hierarchical groups. Such groups can initially get power through an election and later set about modifying the democracy. Many communists in democracies openly acknowledge this goal. This, in addition to the disdain of hierarchical groups to sensible economic rules is the reason, supporting such groups in the democracy is dangerous. People should also remember that hierarchical groups can form with new identities if that helps in uninterrupted power in a democracy. A benevolent dictator who could impose prudent economic policies and also transfer more resources to the poor is a dream that will turn into a nightmare when a cruel dictator takes over, only no one knows how soon.

A democracy has one advantage however. Except in communist dictatorships that label themselves "true democracies", it is permitted to freely express oneself and eventually people may come round to the view that a technological economy with all its comforts needs the kind of economic trade-off outlined here. It is however quite an uphill task and this reality should not be overlooked.

VIII For want of anything better

A government to organise defence, set up courts, operate a police force, levy and collect taxes, determine currency circulation etc. is as much a necessity as private investment for a technologically advanced society. These have to be government monopolies with the government being the sole agency of coercion.

Vesting exclusive coercive power in the hands of the government has been a historical norm independent of the degree to which such a government helped or harmed the technological society. Even the mediaeval kings were unhappy about aristocrats duelling to resolve personal feuds. A private bodyguard can never be given the full range of powers available to a policeman. Governments often limit ownership of guns by private citizens for the same reason.

As mentioned before, coercive power of the government is actually wielded by individuals authorised to act in the name of the government. So the risk of government agents using their coercive powers for settling personal scores exists. However, private settling of vendettas will be much worse as the experience with the mafia shows. Similarly, courts can be approached to scrutinise private voluntary agreements at any time. Sometimes courts undertake such a scrutiny even when none of the parties have any complaints.

Minting of coins has been the royal prerogative for thousands of years. It was not merely the display of royal authority. It

provided some assurance that the coin was made of a precise quantity of the precious metals. In modern societies, governments have exclusive power to print and circulate currency notes. Once again, universal validity within the country offers advantages to the commercial society.

Every one of these exclusive government powers can be misused. Throughout history, governments have built huge armies only to fight wars on the silliest pretexts and cause as much destruction at home as outside the border. Police forces continue to be used to punish innocent citizens for the crime of not supporting those in power. Courts have often been willing tools in the hands of the government to suppress minorities and weaker sections. Throughout history, kings and emperors had seen temporary benefits in debasing the value of the coins and cause lasting damage to commerce. As said earlier, imposing rules and regulations which severely restrict the technological society are very common.

However, having a government is ultimately better than not having a government. It is like the famous quote about democracy; that it is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time. Democracy cannot prevent future misuse of government power but can correct past mistakes with minimal collateral damage.

Except in a communist country, where private investment is totally prohibited, quite a lot of things required for a court, police or military are provided by private suppliers. As an example, the court building may be constructed, repaired and maintained by

private companies. In general, reducing the number of government employees is beneficial. As discussed earlier, government fails as an investor because closing loss making units is politically unacceptable. It also fails to resist over-hiring and demands for increased salaries and pensions by employees.

As it is, the need for private investment limits the resources available with the government for achieving societal values. The high cost of hiring government employees further limits the value received by the society. Sometimes, the use of a government employee is absolutely necessary. All the jobs cannot be handed over to private individuals. For example, the army cannot be replaced by mercenaries fighting for payment.

But a conscious effort to limit government employee numbers to the absolutely necessary minimum is a good financial policy. This also explains why government expenditure should never be considered as investment, even in the case of public facilities like roads. If the road were commercially viable, private operation would be cheaper if only because the salary bill is lower. If the society decides that public roads have the advantage of providing access to individuals who cannot afford to pay the user charges, which is a perfectly valid societal value, it should be considered as a measure to reduce inequality and not an investment.

One additional issue needs to be emphasised. Systems of evaluating and rewarding government employees with superior performance with higher salaries, more perks, bonuses and awards are all obviously necessary. The search for objective, numerical

criteria of evaluation is very attractive but most counterproductive. In particular ideas like ploughing a part of fines for traffic violations imposed or the value of contraband goods seized at borders to the individual or collective benefit of employees is a monstrous hybrid of commercial incentive and government coercive powers. These incentivize the government employees to maximise the financial benefit to themselves rather than the societal benefit of the action. Evaluating government action both to prevent misuse and efficacy has to be a priority but necessarily qualitative rather than quantitative.

Riding the tiger of national debt!^{IX}

The biggest challenge for any government, is to find the financial resources for funding the societal values such as minimising human impact on the environment and free provision of goods and services which most governments prioritise over rapid economic growth. We ignore the failed approach of forcible sudden nationalisation of the economy as was attempted by the communist governments as also the more gradual attempt as tried by several "socialists" such as Atlee in UK and Nehru in India. The nationalised and freshly established public sector has never ever contributed significantly to tax revenue. Deposing the greedy capitalists did not transfer their profits to the public.

Taxes have to be the primary source of money. Other sources such as lease or sale of undeveloped public land, royalty on mineral extraction or spectrum for telecommunication are never significant. Royalty on petroleum is an exception. If, however reluctantly, those in power concede that taxation has to leave enough money in for private individual investment, it will be as easy to find a set of expert economists who argue that the existing tax levels restrict investment as to find another group to argue that the levels can be raised without impacting investment. The blunt answer is nobody knows.

Most governments try to find additional resources through deficit financing. In reality this makes little sense. If the government simply prints currency, it can only increase the prices since no

goods and services are being produced. At very low levels, increasing the issue of notes by the government, reading "I promise to pay the bearer...." may be useful. It will be a kind of assurance that the society at large is sharing the losses if any and encourage individuals to take a gamble. But, at some point, increasing supply will make the money valueless and inflation rates will reach the sky. Converting this idea into quantitative economic theory and trying to calculate how much further money supply can be increased is as usual unreliable.

If instead of increasing money supply, the government takes a loan from the citizens, it effectively reduces the resources available for productive private investment and no amount of sophisticated arguments will alter that basic reality. If the government seeks loans from abroad, temporarily, imports become cheaper but eventually the loans have to be repaid by exports. It makes much more sense for the government to raise taxes and avoid future liabilities in the form of interest payments and accumulating debt. Once again it is easy to find some financial expert to advise lowering or increasing the money supply or borrowing as desired by the government in power.

There are two fundamental reasons why the government of the day should operate with a balanced budget. Firstly, debt is a burden on future generations. In contemporary world, children individually are not liable for the loans of their parents. The days when children became bonded labourers or slaves to discharge parental debts are long gone. In such a situation, it is quite clearly a wrong policy to insist that the children's generation have to collectively repay the loans taken by the government

chosen by the parents' generation. Secondly, the interest burden will restrict money available to governments of the immediate future.

This applies as much to a national debt as to future pension liabilities. There is a difference between a fixed pension paid to all old citizens or a child support payment uniformly provided to all citizens and a pension paid to a government employee which is a fraction of the salary at the time of retirement and often periodically adjusted for cost of living or inflation. The former is a societal value. The latter, an attempt to load part of the cost of hiring a government employee today on future governments and succeeding generations, limiting their freedom of action. However, in a democracy, the politicians try to highlight their utility by showing short term and local benefits. This they feel improves their chances of continuing in power. So sensible policies such as balanced budgets are only possible if a well-informed population recognizes long term benefits.

X

Achieving CORE societal values

Universal availability of food, shelter, education and medical care are the most important core components of societal value being considered here. These are goods and services directly provided to individual citizens. Other societal values ranging from environmental protection to labour laws will be discussed in a subsequent section.

Providing these is a major reason for the government debt described in the previous section. It was pointed out that exclusive coercive powers of the government are absolutely necessary. Should the government use the coercive powers to ensure equitable provision of these core societal values? Can the government do so? Can the government exclusively provide these just as it provides the courts? Is there any other option available to the government to ensure that these are universally available to all citizens?

The answers to these questions depend on whether only the government provides these goods and services without payment or if private entities also provide them on a commercial basis. The very fact that private commerce has been, however reluctantly, permitted implies economic inequality in the society. Thus, the rich exist in the society and will want to pay for better services rather than settle for an equal share of the free or subsidised service provided by the government. For example, they leave government schools and hospitals and turn to commercial ones.

They will lose interest in the quality and efficiency of public services. This more than anything else becomes a major contributor to the inefficiency and corruption in public services.

When private services are perceived to be superior, the government employees to begin with and soon everyone else in the society begin to demand that they be allowed to use private institutions at government cost, since providing the service for free has already been accepted as a societal value. Any democratic government will find it impossible to resist such demands. As more people drift to private service providers, government institutions providing the nominally free services deteriorate even more. The drift to private service providers also leads to third party payer issues. Those using the private service provider at government cost are not conscious of or concerned with the charges of the private service providers. The cost to the government balloons as the private providers increase their charges.

Soon the government, unable to pay the high prices, tries to frame new rules and regulations and force the private service providers to cross subsidise. The private providers will be expected to charge more from some people to compensate for the government paying less or nothing for the services provided to some others. In effect private institutions are acting as the government. The vicious cycle continues with more people forcing the government to extend subsidised payment to them. If pushed too far private service providers would refuse to operate in the regulated environment. As the supply dries up, services will be delayed and waitlists become common. Only the very rich will get the services without having to wait. The senior government func-

tionaries will also jump the queue by misusing power. All this contributes to a complex unwieldy system that satisfies neither the poor nor the rich.

A government monopoly has its own drawbacks. It would still not ensure an egalitarian outcome. All citizens would still not have access to services of equal quality, even in a restricted domain of societal value such as health care or education. The demand for equity and equality is one of the major sources of friction in contemporary societies. So it is most important to understand this reality. As mentioned earlier, government employees will be paid more liberally. Thus, the salary bill will cause the cost of providing these societal values to balloon as with the option of the government paying private service providers.

Even a communist dictatorship, committed to the ideal of "from each according to ability, to each according to necessity" will reserve special goods and high quality services to the hierarchy. Including these "perks", the inequality in a communist society was no less than that of a feudal society. The economy does not grow in such an economic system and the limited availability of resources creates an extreme apartheid with the limited facilities being available purely for the hierarchy.

In a democracy, however imperfect, restricting the private sector from providing on a commercial basis the goods and services offered without cost by the government is very difficult, since the government has less coercive power. But it is worth exploring if such a monopoly is possible, at least for a small part of the economy like healthcare or education.

Several limitations have to be recognized and accepted. First and foremost, even in a democracy special services for the apex of the hierarchy will be provided if only under the cover of security being a necessity. The extremely rich can similarly avail of special services outside the country if not within. So the critical issue will actually be the attitude of the moderately rich. They are the people who could have afforded better services if commercial options are available. Would they be willing to settle for an equal share in inferior common services?

If the government is democratic and imposes a monopoly for a specific service, the richer segments will try to subvert the equality by other methods. For example, there could be demands that these services be provided by the smallest elected body like a town council. Such decentralisation could, as claimed, improve efficiency and tailoring of facilities to match local requirements. But it would also enable "richer" localities to supplement the resources with local taxes and locally improve the quality of service. This will negate the hope that under a government monopoly, services of equal quality will be made universally available. Decentralisation also enables a local majority to severely discriminate against a minority. This very important issue will be discussed later. Only centralization at the level of the nation can have any chance of providing a near universal equitable dispensation, of course ignoring the special treatment of the apex.

Obviously, in a democracy, with an existing income inequality, the capacity to impose a government monopoly differs from one

service to another. Food and housing are areas where a democratic government cannot impose a monopoly. So one should expect that the problems discussed above of free government service coexisting with private service to be relevant for universal provision of food and shelter.

Cost of food will follow the universal law of supply and demand. Rare and consequently costly food will be in demand and available in the market. Not implementing basic food security will earn any government a lot of discredit but implementing one will not earn applause. There will be demands that the free service should not be confined to basic food and ultimately that even bills for dining in a restaurant should be picked up by the government. Rich restaurant owners will of course be very strong supporters.

Housing is even more contentious. A house is valued not only for size but the amenities provided as well as the ambience and the ease of access to civic facilities like hospitals, schools and public transport. So the amenities available for the houses owned or leased by the government and provided as accommodation for the poor are compared to other houses and severely criticised. There will be demands for controlling house rents to make housing in superior locations more affordable. Such laws get more popular support if the rents of larger houses are also controlled. Rent control benefits existing tenants but discourages investment and reduces the availability of rented houses in the future, but this is ignored. Rules and regulations will be used to withhold permissions for new construction of large houses unless affordable housing is included in the project. Prices of existing large

houses will increase and people will become creative at designing the project to allow the rich to bypass the affordable housing and get the ambience they want while obeying the letter of the rule but not the spirit. These are the examples of complex unwieldy systems mentioned earlier that satisfy neither the poor nor the rich.

Universal education is seen as the most important of societal values. Everyone waxes lyrical about the role of education in creating an honest citizen of the world. But the increase in earning capacity is the more important reason for supporting universal free education. Obviously, if education were commercial, children born in poor families would have a huge disadvantage and it would persist for generations.

Free universal education, however desirable, has several problems. Wages are themselves a commodity in the market and subject to the law of supply and demand. One historical anecdote is very illustrative. A hundred years ago, three years of high school education was sufficient to get a clerical job in the British colonial administration in India. Today hundreds of people with five or more years of college education will compete for such a secure job with pension. Handsome salaries are offered to computer programmers these days not only because they have skills but because few people have those skills. Skills are important, but if the number of trained computer programmers increases, the wages drop and people with higher qualifications have to settle for lesser jobs with lower pay. In England, two hundred years ago, public school education was mostly learning Latin and Greek. Languages which no student spoke in real life. That edu-

cation became popular among masses not because it gave any marketable skills but because the students could count on good jobs in the colonial administration. Once again, as the "natives" in colonies started competing for jobs, teaching Latin and Greek was abandoned. The income inequality among people with a specific degree awarded by a school or university will always be very large. So universal education cannot lead to egalitarian outcomes. Education often reinforces inequality. Similarly, licensing in various professions is not only a measure to control quality. It serves the same purpose as the laws of rent control, reducing competition and increasing salaries of existing professionals by placing restrictions on future entrants.

Once we recognize that education is only a support in the competition for well-paying jobs, another major reason why universal free education will not lead to egalitarian outcomes will become apparent. Rich parents will supplement the free education. They will quite often give up some other luxuries to pay for superior private education if it were available. Thinkers since Plato have correctly identified a family as a big impediment to equality. But even the most regimented society cannot do much about it. Further, advances in technology inevitably reduce the availability of low skilled jobs and this increases the competition for high paying jobs and thus the training required. Once again government subsidy on education, whatever form it takes, is a measure to reduce inequality and deliver a societal value. It is not an investment. But with all the limitations, government running free schools and colleges is better than providing low or no interest loans to the students.

These loans create two issues. Because the government picks the bill, students would happily waste time in studies irrelevant to job opportunities. Educational institutions will offer such useless courses of study and admit students without proper educational foundation. Private educational institutions will increase fees charged and the students won't mind. These issues will eventually lead to demands for loan waivers.

Healthcare is the most important societal value. It is also the only one where government monopoly has been implemented in advanced democratic societies. There are two reasons for this. First, for most people, being unhealthy is rare. Even if one is sick, waiting for a doctor is irksome but rarely a huge calamity. The waitlists affect a small number of people and only some of them would expect to be better off if private services were available. So the universal health service monopoly of the government is extremely popular in the advanced democracies that have such a system. Such a system will also mean that healthcare professionals are relatively underpaid but once again, in a democracy, they form an extremely small minority to matter. The high respect for health care professionals helps but the mandated lower incomes will lead to shortage of trained personnel. Often the countries still need to import personnel from poorer nations. Advanced democracies manage to get the required manpower to run the monopoly since trained citizens of poorer countries find even the jobs with the mandated relatively lower paid salaries in rich countries very attractive.

This extremely sketchy description is enough to identify the broad contours of reality in any efforts to achieve egalitarian so-

cietal values in practice. First and foremost, once the necessity of private investment for the technological economy is conceded, and one makes peace with the consequent inequality, universal and egalitarian provision of food, housing is impossible. Free education is possible but will not eliminate the advantage of children with highly educated or rich parents. It is worth repeating that it is the combination of egalitarianism and universality that is impossible. Universal, but non-egalitarian coverage is certainly possible. This would form a safety net. Universal and egalitarian health care is possible provided the upper middle classes are amenable to sharing and the society makes peace with a small group at the top of the administrative hierarchy and the very rich managing to get special exceptions. Once implemented, because of the relatively small number of those adversely affected, a democratic majority will not reverse the government supported universal healthcare. This is an important feature of democracies and we shall return to later.

Complicated regulations about house building, free food options and education will be democratically popular but will not may not always demonstrate lower inequality in practice. Complicated rules increase the chance that some individuals will fall through the safety net. The homeless in extremely rich countries are a classic example. Strict regulation of home construction, high wages of government employees and recreational drugs being illegal restrict the society's ability to prevent the homeless from falling through the cracks of the social safety net. Government coercion will definitely protect some weak individuals but will also adversely affect some other weak individuals. There is no way to quantify and compare the positives and the negatives.

XI Reining in the investors

We have so far discussed one part of societal values, direct provision of certain goods and services to individual citizens, equitably. We will now consider the remaining issues like environmental protection and saving jobs where the benefits are collective. Much of the discussion above, of the difference between a universal dispensation which is viable and the creation of a complex web of rules and regulations which provides only a notional benefit carries forward into these issues too.

For example a ban on the use of specific chemicals that are considered dangerous to the environment is implementable. Reality is still very complex and there are often negative consequences which are not immediately obvious. For example, the outright ban of the pesticide DDT has resulted, in addition to some of the expected benefits to the environment, additional deaths due to malaria in Africa. The two aspects, the regulation not providing as much benefit as claimed as well as the negative consequences that may have been unanticipated or more likely dismissed as non- progressive are universal to every such action by a government. But a ban is in principle possible. Similarly, a uniform limit on the carbon monoxide emissions of vehicles on road will work.

But would for example putting a limit on water flow in a showerhead or water use in a dishwasher as a measure of water conservation be effective? This example shows that even univer-

sal rules will fail if a very large fraction of the society refuses to obey rules or if bypassing the rule is easy and punishing violators is difficult. After all, it doesn't take much skill to modify the showerhead or costly to install two of them. This limitation is applicable to all government rules and regulations, not only those pertaining to economics and industry. We will consider later, how much can be accomplished through severe punishment in a democracy.

Despite repeated failures the intellectual obsession to find an alternative to the much despised private ownership remains very strong. Most modern intellectuals hold their nose at private ownership and pray for deliverance. This quest for an egalitarian alternative has itself become a very strong societal value. So the lesson that every single effort of a government towards an equitable society will inevitably lead to reduced growth will be strongly resented. Rules necessary for private investment and technological growth, such as a stable currency, protection of private property, limited liability, enforcement of contracts and transparency are compromised in the name of societal benefits. Complex web of rules are created in support of these societal ideals. And the response to failures is to add more complexity. There is always strong democratic support for reining in private investors and for government oversight of investment decisions.

Can the society direct private investment into specific areas considered essential? Developed countries such as Sweden or the UK as well as most newly independent poor countries such as India tried this approach after the Second World War. It was perfectly logical. Taxes should be high to leave the surplus in the

hands of the government to invest for social benefit. And private investment is to be approved only after government scrutiny in areas beneficial to a majority. But their efforts were as unsuccessful as the forced communist takeover of the economy in the Soviet Union for the simple reason identified earlier.

Unless prohibited by force, the rich will demand luxury goods as did the communist party leaders in the USSR. People cannot be shamed into not enjoying and demanding luxuries. So investment will be diverted to produce them despite the government rules. This increases both lawlessness and the cost of enforcing the investment policy.

At present, government allotment of resources for investment is a totally fringe opinion. Tweaking the tax code, providing lower taxes as incentives or imposing penal taxes as disincentives are popular. Unfortunately, these end up helping the undeserving rich as much if not more than the deserving poor. When a government with the avowed noble intention of saving jobs bails out a company, it is giving tax money as salaries to the upper management and dividends to shareholders, who often enjoy bonuses from the profits shown in the account books due to government largesse. And there is large scale collusion between private investors and the politicians.

Since the actual economic consequences of any government action cannot be predicted, a trial and error approach for maximisation of tax revenue is the correct option. A simple tax and regulatory system is therefore more useful because the consequences of lowering and raising taxes will be obvious. One can

easily notice when the economy is faltering because private investment is too low. Complex tax laws and regulations, however well intentioned, make the system unresponsive to lowering or increasing tax rates. This defeats the primary goal of maximising tax revenue. Similarly, rather than trying to ensure that every commercial transaction is "fair" or that the workers individually get "fair share of the profits" of individual concerns, the government should concentrate on skimming the profits of all commercial activity and use it to provide things of societal value identified earlier.

However, even when lowering the inequality is considered paramount and reduced growth is accepted, care must be taken to ensure that private investment is available at least for maintenance and replacement. As the share of the government expenditure increases, initially investment for future improvement is compromised. With further increase, maintenance is impacted and finally production of goods and services begins to decrease from current levels. As usual it is not possible to confirm that any particular government has to be downsized or that it can be further augmented.

But one thing has to be clearly recognized. When the economy enters the final phase of decreasing production, the poorer sections of the society suffer more. Unfortunately, at that point, very few options are available to any government. More redistribution will inevitably reduce production further. Enabling more private investment by reducing government expenditure will be politically toxic. Avoiding this vicious circle in the first place by maintaining the support for private investment and resisting the

eternal demands for more government action is the greatest challenge to any democratic government.

That being the case, it is not to be expected that the brief description of the limitations outlined above will suffice to turn anyone away from any let alone all conceivable complex measures to achieve an egalitarian society. The only hope is that the simple logical, straightforward and impartial argument has some chance of at least limiting passions.

XII Educating and re-educating

As was said before, human society is not an anthill but a pride of lions. So there is no genetic pressure on the individual human being to give primacy to socially beneficial values and ignore personal benefit. However it is very obvious that human behaviour is easily modified. Children need to "learn" even to speak! Children are taught various skills and educating them when they are young and impressionable to accept collective values as superior to individual benefit seems to be very simple. Of course education in this context is not acquiring commercially valuable skills which was discussed earlier.

Unfortunately, this ideal moral education never suffices. Humans are extremely unpredictable. They may be trained to accept and even become aggressive about one issue with a little effort but they could become furiously opposed to that very idea later. Often there is no obvious reason for the change. Unless prohibited by extreme coercion, emergence of mutually antagonistic viewpoints in a society is inevitable. So, educating an individual to sacrifice personal benefit for societal values will be called education by those sympathetic to the value and indoctrination by those not approving the value. Education will not suffice, irrespective of whether the authority responsible for the "education" is democratic, dictatorial or religious.

Open intellectual disagreement is a big problem for any society "earnestly" seeking to achieve any particular societal value. This is true whether the value is redistribution of goods and services

in a technologically advanced society or the belief in an after world in a theocracy or for that matter, a classless Marxist utopia. Preventing diversity of thought and imposing intellectual conformity is simpler than coercing individuals who have come to hold a counter opinion. Thus, the Catholic Church or the communist party, when they have power, refuse to allow the individual any freedom to question the values and enforce conformity of thought with an iron hand.

Although in contemporary democracies, the iron hand is denied to the woke liberal intelligentsia, they do try, through control of the social science departments or academia, claiming "scientific expertise" and trying to control the so-called "mainstream media". Every society, democratic or otherwise, uses reward and punishment in the quest for their preferred societal values and often call punishment "re-education".

An often underplayed feature of decisions in democratic societies is that they adversely affect a small group of citizens and often positively help only a different small segment. This was most obvious in the earlier discussion of nationally mandated free medical services. Those providing the medical services are adversely affected. They earn less than what they would have done in a free commercial healthcare market. This disadvantage is not faced by other citizens working in other jobs. So there is discrimination. Those who could afford to buy better health services on commercial terms are also adversely affected. They have to wait for their turn and cannot buy superior healthcare. Those who need medical services but cannot afford, another, perhaps a larger segment of the society, are of course benefited.

It is important to recognize that all decisions to achieve societal values, big or small, pertaining to the egalitarian provision of goods and services or enforcement of common cultural practices, inevitably exhibit this feature. Those convicted of crimes, families and sympathisers would find moderate punishment attractive. But it would be resented by the victims and their families. Some may claim that such a punishment is humane. Others could see it as an invitation for more crime. Even these champions of humane punishment could be selective. They may demand very severe punishment for the violations of some laws and leniency when the accused belong to certain groups. In a democracy, individuals will have different perceptions of what societal values should be encouraged and what the society should try to implement. When the numbers strongly opposed to the societal decision are small, a core group of committed enthusiasts is all that is required to get the society to approve the measure.

How far the desired societal values are realised in a democracy depends not on whether the supporters are a few committed enthusiasts or an overwhelming part of the society. It solely depends on the number of those adversely affected and whether they are "sullenly submissive", "covertly counteractive" or "daring to defy".

The last of these, "daring to defy", when related to geography becomes very problematic. If the minority is geographically concentrated in a region, the resentment against the majority could boil over into secessionist movements. It is reasonable for the local majority to seek to secede, get political power and avoid being adversely affected. Of course, there is always another

minority in this region to complain against this majority. For example the provincial leader who claims that a nationally mandated official language is discrimination would not think twice to impose a majoritarian language on linguistic minorities in the province. Similarly, those who advocate violence against the majority can be expected to be violent with their own minorities as and when they succeed.

The cause for the grievance of the minority may be majoritarian decisions about language and religion. The cause could be how high the taxes should be. It could even be a desire to corner the royalties on natural resources or taxes paid by the rich for local use. The demands could range from complete independence to carving out of a new city. The number willing to defy and of course sanctioning of violence are the most important determinant of whether the majority gets to implement the decision.

The secessionists may seek to replace the democratic government with a theocratic or communist dictatorship. Even more dangerously, multiple mutually antagonistic groups may emerge ensuring that no government with exclusive coercive power is left. Violent chaos and anarchy results. The defiance of an individual should not be confused with such collective challenges to the existing democratic majority. Only the government should have the power to coerce individuals. Collective defiance is a challenge to this fundamental reason for the necessity of a government. Individual defiance is not as dangerous.

Contrary to common wisdom the role of education in addressing any of the above issues is quite marginal. Educating those not

adversely affected is irrelevant and educating those adversely affected would at best be sullen and silent. "Re-educating" or more correctly punishing the "covertly counteractive" or the "daring to defy" is the only option.

This reality is most obvious when we consider the case of the armed forces. Respect for the defenders of the country is held to be sacrosanct. Everyone in the country is educated to this collective value. And individuals in the force are further educated to lay down their lives for the nation and for saving each other in line of action. But it will be silly in the extreme to pretend that all this can be accomplished by education alone, in the absence of severe punishments meted out for the smallest violation of discipline, the court martials and fairly extensive perks, pensions and salaries.

As already mentioned, re-education is punishment. Detecting the violation of laws, identifying the culprit and enforcing the punishment have an economic cost. To begin with, those enforcing laws need to be paid. And they should be supervised to ensure that personal vendettas are not being settled in the name of punishing lawbreakers. Increasing the severity of punishment is often a rallying cry of those emotionally committed to the law. This "broken windows" argument, claims that tolerating small violations will lead to more severe violations of law in the future. It has severe negative consequences. If the number who violate the law is too large, enforcing the law would be prohibitively expensive. Branding a large fraction of the society as criminals could lead to the very lawlessness that the broken windows approach was expected to prevent.

Leaving laws on paper without punishing violators has its own disadvantages. Ignoring the law becomes a contagion and all laws are ignored. Soon, the entire law enforcement system, the police and the judiciary become a media circus. Policing the protesting crowds, providing security to politicians. Handling isolated cases that happen to achieve publicity or notoriety are prioritised while the legal delays become astronomical.

Proving the guilt of the accused is an important challenge to the achievement of societal goals. Should the accused be considered innocent unless proven guilty beyond all reasonable doubt? The answer to this challenge divides societies into two schools of thought mirroring the divisions identified earlier. Those championing the freedom of the individual would insist that every accused must be held innocent unless proven guilty beyond all reasonable doubt. They would even proclaim that it is better that many guilty persons escape punishment, than that one innocent person be convicted and punished. They advocate a less stringent standard, preponderance of evidence, rather than proving beyond reasonable guilt, only when the court decision leads to economic loss rather than loss of liberty by imprisonment.

Those having reservations about this principle will always be an overwhelming majority in any democracy. They fear that proof beyond doubt would hamper societal efforts to "persuade" the individual to serve collective aims, both economic redistribution and cultural uniformity. All these collectivists would grumble about increased cost of law enforcement and the rich employing clever lawyers to avoid their societal "responsibilities". They de-

mand proof of innocence from the accused rather than the society proving guilt but only if the accused belong to some groups. Some insist that individuals are responsible not only for their own actions but for actions by other members of their group and even their ancestors. Thus, for the same violation of law individuals belonging to some groups are to be more severely punished. The core principle being not to treat crime as an act of an individual nor victims as individuals.

Not very surprisingly, the same people who murmur at innocent unless proven guilty demand stringent proof beyond reasonable doubt, when an individual is accused of incompetence and risks losing a job or other economic benefits but only if the individual belongs to “disadvantaged groups”. Many would like to change poorly drafted laws with retrospective effect criminalising actions completely legal at the time of action. Obviously all of these violate the principle of proof beyond reasonable doubt and personal culpability. Such an alliance of cultural and economic collectivists will always form an overwhelming majority in a democracy. The reservations about proving all crimes beyond reasonable doubt fare no better than the plethora of complex rules did in achieving collectivist economic values as discussed earlier. Just as in the case of economic redistribution, the consequences of such laws will please neither the collectivists nor the individuals. Frightening the citizens into obedience will need the society to be turned into a prison. This is impossible in any democracy, no matter how much the society strives to educate and re-educate the citizens.

Acts of violent crime in a society may target specific individuals or random members of certain groups or the society at large. However, in all cases, education, despite all the hype, will never be an effective means of preventing the very small number of actual perpetrators. The best option for society is to treat them purely as a violation of law by individuals in all cases without exceptions. Society better accept that it can only punish crime and not prevent. But this is very unpopular.

It is instructive to remember that individuals in the technological society are more addicted to commercial jobs than to the various goods and services. There is a huge pressure to seek employment. A job seen as giving freedom though the individual has to do what the employer demands during the working hours. The job is sought after because the wages enable the individual to purchase not “any” but the “chosen” goods and services. This freedom did not exist in the pre technological societies nor even now for those without jobs. Obviously those who earn more enjoy more freedom but even the others aspire for freedom. Everyone is aware that the government paying for "essential" goods leads to more freedom of buying with what we earn. That is a big reason for the wide popularity of government funded services.

Philosophers have for millennia recognized that any majority decision closely resembles tyranny and worried about this. The one solution, restricting the powers of the government and legally respecting only individual rights rather than group claims is as unpopular as private investments and the market. All in all, the universal chant that man is a social animal without quite defining what social means in this context, is a cover for sanctifying ma-

majority coercion. Education can have only marginal utility and the majority can only realise their preferred societal values that seek to restrict individual freedom with very severe coercion not compatible with democracy.

XIII Travails of a majority

An individual can influence a democratic decision only by associating with like-minded people and forming a group. So a democratic majority, by necessity will be the alliance of groups with diverse demands. It is only reasonable to expect individuals to coalesce into groups that offer a chance of getting free goods and services at government cost, just as they rush to a sale with a high discount. Extreme popularity of groups, indifferent or even antagonistic to the requirements of a technological society and intent on forcing individuals to follow the cultural and social practices is at first sight a bit perplexing.

Why do vast democratic majorities often support such groups despite their favouring severe punishment for the blasphemers, those who challenge them intellectually and apostates, those who accept their view initially but change their mind later? The fear of these "bad apples" spoiling the rest is one possible answer. Frustration and anger at the failure of "education", from which so much was expected, to prevent people becoming blasphemers and apostates contributes.

There is however a more visceral reason. Many if not most are tempted to become blasphemers or apostates but were not brave enough to do so. So they are extremely jealous of those who did defy the collective. Wanting to break off shackles and being scared to do so, thereby settling for stability are basic human traits. Friction between these traits does not encourage leniency.

But, a democracy, if it should remain one, cannot be overtly cruel in handling blasphemers and apostates.

The democratic majority and the minority, in most cases differ only in the groups they represent. They also differ in which crony capitalists are to be offered government contracts and hand-outs but this will never be admitted in public. In a democracy the minority is unhappy because its policies are not accepted but the majority is, if anything even more unhappy, because it has political power but cannot achieve what it wants.

The first of the travails of the majority is that there is no escape from reducing current consumption in order to encourage private investment. This will not be palatable to most democratic majorities. The second is that unless the democratic majority is willing to jettison democracy itself, it cannot achieve an egalitarian provision of even core societal values other than universal health care. A related issue is that the majority cannot expand the universal services indefinitely through deficit financing.

The last of the above reveals another important feature of many democratic decisions. They limit the scope of future majorities. The deficit financing of yesterday, the action of an earlier majority limits the current majority. A government that commits to payment of liberal pensions or finances the then current expenditure with debt is limiting future governments.

Similar problems of "path dependence", limitations imposed on future democratic majorities by current action occur even in non-financial matters. One of the most important, and unfortunately

one never recognized is seen in laws restricting or enhancing individual liberty. It is always more difficult for society or a government, notwithstanding approval by an overwhelming majority, to limit current freedoms rather than it was, to legalise that freedom. It is just like opening doors under the pressure of people wishing to pass through being easier than closing a door through which people are passing. This once again demonstrates how "antwish", wishing that humans could be easily educated to choose societal benefit over self-interest is very common but quite naive. Restricting freedoms that are currently being enjoyed will not be possible when there are large numbers "covertly counteractive" or "daring to defy". This applies even to such simple matters as tax rates. A large increase in tax rates does not increase tax revenue because people will try to avoid paying the extra tax through measures that are technically legal or they may even opt to take a chance that the government will not be able to detect, prove and punish their defiance. To the majority, reducing taxes is merely unpopular. Raising them and collecting them is a big challenge.

In most democratic countries, majorities take decisions at the local, provincial and national levels. There are often more levels, some of them overlapping. What if there are disagreements among these majorities? Most democratic societies organise these in a hierarchy with the national decision making at the apex, empowered to overrule democratic majorities at the lower level. The Indian Constitution says that the powers not "given" to states (provinces) are vested in the centre. There are however at least two examples of democracies that limited the power wielded by the apex authority, the United States and Switzerland.

The American constitution specifies that the powers not "listed" as belonging to the federal government belong to the states (provinces) and to the individuals. This is obviously the influence of philosophers who argued that a decision by the democratic majority is often a tyranny. That has led to the famous concept of checks and balances. In the centralised democracies, individual rights are limited to those "approved" by the collective. In non-centralised ones, the powers of the government are limited to those "approved" by the individuals. However, a non-centralised democracy does not automatically offer more freedom of action universally to all individuals. Non-centralisation will not only reduce redistribution creating islands of affluence. Supremacy of local government had helped them to severely tyrannise small minorities with impunity.

In all democracies, the current majority will try to alter the laws in order to retain power. This may be done by making changes to the constitution or even totally rewriting it. Centralised democracy obviously gives almost unlimited power to the current majority to make such changes. If constitutional changes are not within grasp, which is often the case in non-centralised democracies, courts are manipulated to the same end. Centralised democracies are more easily converted into quasi dictatorships. This is not very surprising since centralization of power is the norm in dictatorships and feudal societies and for that matter the pride of lions.

This analysis of the travails of the majority clearly explains much observed social reality. It explains the failure of poor

countries to derive any benefits from repeated changing of constitutions and their search for traitors and conspiracies to explain away that failure. It explains the frustrated lamentations of modest majorities in non-centralised democracies who look enviously at the success of their counterparts in the centralised democracies in implementing more liberal universal safety nets. It explains that people used to the freedom of choosing to buy superior services are unwilling to support morally superior universal services and have an advantage in non-centralised democracies, where the majority is more constrained by the constitution.

The claimed "superiority" of one method of determining majority support over the other is in reality a travail of the majority in a specific context. The advocates hope that the alternative will enhance their chances of achieving and retaining power. The detractors are worried that their chances will suffer. It is true that in the Westminster or "first past the post" system of elections, even political parties who win less than a majority of votes cast may win a super majority among elected representatives and the US president may have got less votes than his defeated opponent. Proportional representation and forcing every eligible voter to actually cast a vote may result in the government having an absolute majority of eligible voters. But even that would only mean a small excess over the 50% empowering the majority to ride roughshod over a near majority. Elections are only an objective method of taking decisions in a democracy which is nothing but the willingness of the citizens to accept the laws of governance either by choice or fear of coercion. Ascribing moral superiority to one election process over the others is not justified. The only

merit of a democracy is that decision making is peaceful. But democracy as a system demands that no one should view losing an election as Armageddon or a threat to their very existence

No matter how much the majority may want or try, a significant number of individuals will not, unless coerced, give societal values preference over self. Individuals use their intellect to bypass societal coercion. Technological progress gives far more options to the nimble individual than to the government behemoth. The ultimate travail of the majority is due to these defiant individuals. The majority are damned if they strongly enforce the laws and damned if they don't. With strong enforcement, the society descends into violent chaos or a functional anarchy. Laxity in enforcement encourages the current minority to challenge the majority.

XIV Individual defiance

An individual balances the benefits of defying the government against the consequences of doing so. But, the democratic majority does not have a mechanism to balance coercion against success in achieving societal values. For example, balancing the demands of various groups seeking to enhance their share of subsidies, freebies or rents from the government is difficult in itself. Trying to reduce them to suit the circumstances will be a nightmare in a democracy. This is a case of opening a door being easier than closing it. Altering laws of social conduct will also be more contentious.

So coercion by any democratic majority will tend to increase with time. What the government is expected to deliver and consequently the share of government expenditure in the economy relentlessly increases. This leads to more coercion of the individual and becomes an incentive for individuals to consider defiance as an option for avoiding personal financial loss and freedom of action. Most democracies are not prisons and it will not be too difficult for individuals to covertly or openly defy the dictates of the majority rather than sullenly or resignedly obey.

Individuals may occasionally defy society not for personal benefit but with a view of altering the society. Such defiance could benefit society. Defying existing societal norms peacefully and then accepting the punishment according to law forces a society to reconsider the norm, reduce the severity of punishment and possibly change the norm. One challenge does not achieve all

this but the example could enthuse others to follow the leader and eventually result in success. Significant social reform has been realised by such peaceful defiance. Similarly, creative individuals in pre technological societies had to risk defying the majority.

But these instances are rare and probably occur only where the individual dissent is not too brutally suppressed. Prisons are not destroyed by individual defiance nor are brutal dictatorships deterred by it. Society should not use a few successes to justify all acts of individual defiance. Democracy already provides a means of changing the norms.

Individual acts of defiance for personal gain are far more common. They are also more important for the present discussion. As was mentioned earlier, creating laws that are not harsh but still prevent individual defiance is not easy for a democratic majority. Complex regulations are far more irritating for individuals than very high tax rates. Salaries of highly skilled individuals are adjusted to cover higher local tax rates. Government expenditure crowding out private investment is more of a loss collectively for the society rather than to those with highly remunerative skills. Complexity in financial rules makes individual defiance more attractive because detecting and prosecuting is more difficult, for the government. Similarly, individuals who can maintain a distance from the society, for example by remote working and living in rural or semi- rural areas make it more difficult for the government to detect the violation of complex regulations. In an advanced technological society, the rich and highly skilled individuals can more easily establish this separation from society

and easily side step government mandated rules and restrictions. Use of modern surveillance technology as a countermeasure by the government works only when the societies are non- democratic. Even with moderate freedoms, such measures will fail to eliminate individual defiance but will add to regulatory burden on the others.

Politics is the mechanism employed by the democratic majority to discipline the individual and achieve societal values. While the defiant individual demands the right to be left alone, the collective wants to enforce the rights to be provided for. The former, freedom of expression, equality before law and ownership of property, called negative fundamental rights, only require the government to punish those who violate the rights of others. The latter, like the right to food, shelter, medical care and the right not to be offended, also called positive or universal rights, require the government to coerce others, through taxes, regulation or both and run into economic limits as discussed earlier. The two are eternally in conflict and the collective always hopes that restricting the former will result in achieving the latter.

The natural tendency of individuals to resist coercion and discipline is helped by support for individual investment being very essential for sustaining an advanced technological society. This gives the upper hand to the individual. As with economic policies and tax rates, the specific limits imposed on individual liberty will need to be adjusted by trial and error. More the unwillingness of the majority to accommodate the reality of inevitable individual defiance, more the conflict and dysfunctionality in societies.

XV The past and the present

Humanities encompasses everything that humans did and are doing at present. Their past, their language, their logical thinking, their thoughts, their interactions with each other and ultimately their discussions of things that are beyond their own sensual perception and logic. All these had been discussed since antiquity and newer specialised branches of academic study are emerging everyday. What has been described in earlier sections is economics and politics. They are the most relevant for a viable advanced technological society.

Curiosity about humans who lived earlier is universal. The more ancient human history is part of the natural evolution of life. When we turn to an examination of recent human history, a few important differences with economics and politics become very obvious.

All complex economic activity is built up of individual acts of the exchanges of goods or services for money. Similarly, a conflict between the individual desire for freedom of action and the attempt by the society to control commercial exchanges and violence between individuals is the core reality of complex politics. Nothing similar exists in the various branches of humanities like anthropology, archaeology, oral and written history and sociology that seek to study various aspects of the human past. So individual studies in these specialities are very disjointed.

This leads to the reality that is often heard in contemporary discussion of news which is after all a study of the immediate past. There is no news; only views. There is a surfeit of information about contemporary events which has been further amplified by contemporary communication technology and social media activity. So any presentation or description of any event has to highlight some aspects of the event and ignore others leading to it. As the interest shifts to the more distant past, less information is available. Does the information available give a true picture of the past? The reliability of what is available will be a limitation. An "expert" may be called on to study, understand and interpret what is available. Is what is available representative of the past? Are the experts really objective seekers of reality, disinterested in the conclusions they draw?

As was observed repeatedly in earlier sections, expertise in economics and politics does not provide any objective description of societal reality. That ideally should have been the goal of a "social science". The expertise merely provides both supporters and opponents of each and every economic and political action in a democracy with sophisticated justification to convince others and try to achieve social values they prefer. But, as is clear from earlier discussion, all values both individualist and societal are emotional and subjective.

The experts are also not disinterested observers. They get paid for their expertise and acclaim and adulation is a bonus. It is very common to demand disclosure of financial supporters and accusations of bias when support is non-governmental. But in reality government support also results in biased expertise. It is biased

in favour of the contemporary majority and in support of more government action. When the expert is a "professional", being paid for the service, ensuring that the profession continues is the biggest bias of all. No research report ends without a call for further study! Exaggerating the validity of conclusions not only stokes the personal ego of the investigator, it is a key in the competition for funds. This is true of all science, not exclusive to "social science".

Scientists of today and not only "social scientists" of today are "not disinterested seekers of objective truth". It is doubtful that any scientist ever was. Science has a hierarchy and fundamental physics acts as a reality check. No similar limitation exists in humanities. The seller of a perpetual motion machine can only be an individual cheater. In the areas under consideration, impossibilities can be persuasively peddled to vast populations, with the aid of "expertise", pareidolia as it was called before.

But the most important reason why the past can never be a useful guide for the present or future of humanity is technical progress and not the selective use of information about the past or the bias of the experts. If, as everyone agrees, the progress of science and technology in recent times has been truly revolutionary, one should expect that human society has also been changed beyond comparison. So, while the past may be of subjective interest, its utility is questionable.

Individual property rights help create a vast array of technological comforts and their being available in a commercial market makes the individual less willing to compromise with the de-

mands of family and society. Humans move easily to new areas exacerbating the trend. Advances in medicine have increased life spans, making death rarer and predictable. Worries about life after death have been reduced making religion unimportant for large numbers. Printing and widespread literacy had increased the exposure to other cultures while more recently social media has helped create strong groups of geographically separated individuals. Digital libraries have empowered individuals to easily evade attempts of the government to restrict access to some material leaving imposition of very severe punishments for such transgression in a severely repressive society as the only option for authorities. The advances in technology have also gradually increased skills required for humans to compete with machines while reducing the physical strength required. This for example has been a major factor in women seeking to compete for jobs with men challenging the traditional gender roles of agrarian societies.

Advanced technology has not been a universal blessing. The conflict between individual and collective values has been a major thread of the narrative in earlier sections. There are also those who fear the possibility of human extinction due to nuclear war or climate change. But the irrelevance of the past as a guide to the future cannot be questioned.

Paradoxically, advances in science and technology have enabled a more precise study of the past. To take a very recent example, traces of the genes of Neanderthals who existed between 500,000-50,000 years before the present were found in some contemporary humans by analysing a handful of bones found

buried in ice. Modern computer graphics help one to visualise ancient Rome. Restoration and preservation of ancient art is another example where modern technology has contributed enormously. Not only can, one never be certain that the information available is truly representative of the past. Current narrative about what is available from our collective past is strongly biased in favour of a narrative that can show currently successful groups in the worst possible light. It has been correctly said that history is written by the winners and to glorify their heroes. It is equally true of the current era where the dominant ideology of the contemporary academicians is the basis for dragging those heroes from their perch and hoisting new ones. This it is hoped will offer solace to those who were unable to acquire skills and so couldn't compete with the heroes of the past. Another goal of the dominant ideology is to create a democratic majority in favour of strong government intervention in the economy. Unfortunately, such non-objective expertise has encouraged majoritarian excesses.

However, humans have an emotional connection to the past, quite distinct from these efforts to obtain benefits for the self, progeny or other members of the group. This emotional connection is an aesthetic experience as discussed next.

XVI The aesthetic experience

An aesthetic experience creates an emotional response in a human. Every experience that results in an emotion cannot however be called aesthetic. An aesthetic experience is best described as an experience not exclusive to a single individual while not being universal to all humans and one that does not result in an immediate physical activity.

We named the emotional connection many humans feel to historical incidents an aesthetic experience. As is obvious, an individual who is excited by the valour of a hero, dejected by the loss of a war or feeling compassionate at the suffering of innocent people is not a participant of the war. The individual doesn't rush into action either. A soldier in contrast is trained not to be emotional when fighting. That these emotional responses are not exclusive to one individual or universally felt by all is equally obvious. In sensory experience, the relationship between perception and experience is direct. In aesthetic experience it is not. By this definition, pornography or inciting a crowd to violence are not aesthetic experiences. In the example above, a participant in the war experiences the sights, sounds and smells of fighting. The audience listening to a musician singing a ballad about a war are only hearing musical notes and understanding the meaning of words.

More the difference between the sensory experience and emotions experienced, more authentic the aesthetic experience. For

example, visiting a scene, seeing a picture of the same scene and reading a description of the scene optionally accompanied by music may cause similar emotional responses. But, direct physical experience is most distant from pure aesthetic experience. The physical world is not under individual control. A storm may disturb the enjoyment of the scene, enjoying a painting is not distributed so easily. It is a more aesthetic experience. Words and notes of music offer the purest aesthetic experience. Sensory organs are involved in seeing the scene, seeing the painting as well as hearing the music and words. But the aesthetic experience of the musical notes is totally internal as is the emotion generated by reading or listening to words. Aesthetic experience can lead to many different emotions, compassion, pity, abhorrence, humour, sexual euphoria, amusement, fear, appreciation of valour of ancients, calm contemplation of peace, etc. Scholars have attempted since ancient times to categorise the emotions and understand how to create a perfect aesthetic experience.

Why are aesthetic experiences not universal? To understand this, we should look at biological phenomena similar to the aesthetic experience; the songs and dances of birds seen during courtship which superficially resemble aesthetic experience. Both the ability to attract and be attracted are necessary biological functions for mating and reproduction of birds and these behaviours do not change. Humans in contrast can learn to appreciate new activities and even those that are initially quite distasteful because they like the long term consequences. People prefer bitter alcoholic drinks even when the same alcohol induced euphoria can be obtained with sweeter beverages. Every smoker of tobacco had to suffer through an initial period of coughing. Such a tolerance for

discomfort and pain is not confined to addictive substances like alcohol or nicotine. Many tribal customs throughout ages resulted in deformed bodies which involve a tremendous amount of physical pain not only at the beginning but throughout life.

This indicates that a large part of human aesthetic experience is learned and that it can even negate biological traits. While nobody is born preferring the cawing of a crow over a cuckoo's song, some groups prefer music that another could consider merely loud noise and vice versa. The mind can be trained or "educated" to appreciate and enjoy specific aesthetic experiences. This creates an opportunity for experts who can evaluate and guide both the creators who provide the aesthetic experience and those who will experience.

In contemporary technological societies, training, creation and experiencing are quite often commercial transactions. The aesthetic experience is delicately balanced between commercial activity that may be required for creating an aesthetic experience and any commercial activity that may be triggered by that experience. As an example, painting as a profession can be a commercial activity. The viewer deciding to buy the painting is another commercial activity. Between these two is the real aesthetic experience. The aesthetic experience is unaltered even if painting was just a relaxation for the painter who is not interested in selling and the viewer is a visiting friend. Similarly, creating an aesthetic experience totally differs from experiencing one, irrespective of whether the act of creation is commercial or the creator claims to do so purely for self-satisfaction. As mentioned above, the creator experiences not the emotions of the audience

but an exclusive non sensory experience of pleasure in the accomplishment.

Intrusion of commerce and politics into aesthetic experience is inevitable in a technological society. Unless the creators are monks willing to forego the comforts available in the society, the creators would not be willing to put in an effort in creating an aesthetic experience of high quality for others without financial compensation. Only some art forms can be created by everyone and without commercial concerns.

Ideally an aesthetic experience has to be evaluated and respected irrespective of whether the creator was trying to please a few rich buyers or catering to a large public, each making small individual contributions or is creating in pursuit of political ideology or personal religious practice or only self- satisfaction. This ideal will never be respected and for the usual reason. Specific art forms or aesthetic experiences that result in specific emotions are applauded as superior because of collective values. Patriotism and empathy for misery are both applauded though patriotism may be the cause of misery. Further, coercive power of public opinion or government is used to promote these aesthetic preferences while suppressing antagonistic views as deviant art. Experts instead of making a living by trying to influence the creators or buyers become the executors of this great project of "education". In reality, emotional responses to aesthetic experiences will very rarely lead to any behavioural changes in the world at large. This is even more unlikely than other educational goals. But such logic rarely gets any respect in the real world. For example, it never occurs to either the buyers or supporters of

traditional art produced by poor tribals that this is not a meaningful economic support for the disadvantaged creators since the demand for such art, despite all propaganda will remain both sporadic and rare.

The art that can be produced by anyone, without significant training, is called simple or sometimes primitive. Is the aesthetic experience of a complex or sophisticated art superior to or necessarily inferior to the simple or primitive art? The answer is emphatic. No. It is not. With a few exceptions like musical notes appearing to be pleasant to most ears, all aesthetic preferences are "learned". So people may certainly come to appreciate simple art rather than complex ones.

What exactly are simple and complex arts? Consider writing as a simple example. Is a writer who uses a larger vocabulary more likely to create a superior aesthetic experience? Using words that demand a dictionary does not necessarily improve the aesthetic experience but an extremely limited vocabulary will be a handicap to expression. Similarly, the use of complex sentence structures or obeying the restrictions of rhyme and rhythm as in traditional poetry or disobeying grammar rules will not in themselves determine the quality of aesthetic experience. Words and the rules of linking them offer infinite possibilities for the creator to produce something that the reader or listener can relate to from their own real life experiences. Aesthetic experience is never universal because the individual experiences may overlap but are never identical. A minimum of rules are however required so that the creator finds among humanity others who can relate to the art created.

Away from words, in audible notes of music and the colours and forms of visual experience, one encounters small building blocks that for want of a better word are called icons in the present work. The icons may or may not permit a large number of possibilities for creators. Simple art is the result of the icons and rules permitting only a limited variety. In complex art, the variety is extensive. Simple rhythms and colour patterns are examples of icons that can be identified by almost everyone without any prior training. They are like simple words that are understood by anyone who knows the language.

Complex rules and icons demand that the creator learn to be creative while respecting rules and the audience train itself to enjoy the aesthetic experience. Learning to create within rules is possible but difficult. Reducing the number of creators. The aesthetic experience will be limited to those who have made an effort to familiarise themselves with these rules of creation. This restricts the size of the audience.

So the unanswerable question of whether a more complex art form offers a superior aesthetic experience leads to a counter question. Is aesthetic experience superior just because it is shareable with a larger audience? Is it justified for those unwilling to train themselves to disparage those creators and audience who do?

Aesthetic preferences are truly subjective. Satisfaction with the familiar and curiosity about the unfamiliar are two fundamentals traits of human behaviour and they influence aesthetic prefer-

ences. Both technology and social organisation cause important and subtle changes to subjective preferences. The most common influence of society is availability. Naturally more popular art forms will be more accessible and lead to more familiarity. They are also praised more, forcing individuals to be diffident about choosing others. More popular arts also receive direct and indirect financial support from the government. Societies legally bar some activities that claim to be arts and non-democratic societies as expected ban many more such arts. Societal values may support simple art forms potentially approved by very large audiences. They may also create mass hysteria in favour of arts that no one individually prefers but this individualist preference is silenced by sheer numbers.

Influence of technology is more direct and it as before is more helpful to the individual in defying the collective. For example, lack of technology for easy transmission of literature, high cost of books, lack of universal literacy leading to reliance on oral transmission have all been responsible for making poetry the default form of literature in the ancient world. Printing has reversed this all over the world. The digital revolution has similarly made huge changes in the lives of artists. When the creations of the greatest of all times are easily available, who will support a contemporary artist unless there is a novelty? Why try to create realistic art when cameras can provide far more realistic pictures in the hands of untrained amateurs? Chat bots have not yet gotten onto the best seller lists but they probably can write novels. On the flip side, at least in societies that grant some individual freedom, peer pressure is not very effective and individuals with similar tastes can linkup on the internet. It is equally possible

that such groups form around ancient art forms with ancient texts laying down elaborate rules of creation. Groups may also form around the latest novel idea of a creator. Antiquity does not make the rules, categories and logic universal in any sense of the word. They are of course revered and glorified by the creators and the connoisseurs of specific art forms. However, the rules and icons if any in the latest modern art form are exactly as subjective as the ancient texts.

There is of course the possibility that the groups supporting the ancient or complex art forms include some or even a majority that are merely hypocrites who want to be seen as associated with the art, disdaining the rest as philistines. It is also possible that the creator of the latest fad had an ulterior motive of ridiculing the followers of this new creativity. Ultimately the only reality about aesthetics is that it is subjective, close to self-perception and is at the same time influenced by both society and technology.

XVII The question of the subjective

The perception of the self and the ability to use language to convey the existence of that perception to others is possibly unique to humans. But it is impossible to experience the perceptions of others. No matter how much we claim to love another and to share their pain, personal experience of pain is obviously different from "sharing". However much one may empathise with others, the difference between personal suffering and empathy for others is undeniable. So, the notion that everyone is sentient, defined as having similar ability of perception is just a convenient "social convention" not a verifiable fact. In an interesting twist to this argument, some ancient scholars have argued that it is not possible for an individual to know if he is awake or dreaming. This again is trivially true. It is just like the inability to prove to oneself that everyone else also has a feeling of a self.

Death or an end to this feeling of the self cannot also be "understood". Since self-awareness is lost in deep sleep, death is often called eternal sleep. The mystery of death in relation to self-perception is the driving force behind all the religious discussions about the continuation of the self beyond death. The religious claim were accepted as true by most of the society in ancient times. A small fraction of contemporary society accept them as literally true. Records show that even in ancient times, atheists had raised rational objections to these religious statements. The atheists were not very successful in that era since the chances of sudden and immediate death were very high. Modern dominance

of atheism and dismissal of religious speculation are the result of modern technology which ensures a reasonable chance of staving off immediate death.

Self-awareness, the source of all the discourses about religion and theology cannot be rationally examined. Every purveyor of theology has always claimed superiority of his analysis over every other opposing theological study. For all this controversy, the role of theology in personal acceptance of religion is very minimal. There are two and only two ways an individual comes to accept a religion, venerates a theology and observes the practices prescribed. Either birth or by accepting the arguments of others. Some religions are exclusive to those born to practising adherents, for example all tribal religions. Others proselytise, try to convert adherents of other religions. Christianity and Islam are examples. Theology is not a major cause of success in converting others. No one really becomes an atheist because of intellectual arguments either.

In modern societies, atheistic analysis of religion, comparing religions and trying to find reasons for the continued acceptance of religion by some individuals even in technologically advanced societies have added to traditional theology. These can be called a Darwinian examination since they have been inspired by Darwin's theory of identifying adaptations that help in survival of animal species.

The decision of the individual to be religious or atheistic is critically influenced by the assessment of the material advantages and coercion. In this context, coercion is not only the fear of the

punishments imposed by society on apostates and blasphemers. Indirect coercion caused by the circumstances is equally important. For example, in non-commercial societies most individuals have to be observant members of the religion for survival. Even in commercial societies of today, individuals who do not possess highly remunerative skills have no option but to subscribe to the majority opinion. Both theology and Darwinian science ignore this indirect coercion and use sophisticated arguments to create an illusion of utility or value. The similarity to earlier discussion on different art forms and historical research is obvious. Religion itself can be shoehorned into the framework of consuming for immediate comfort and investing for the future. It is logical to claim that in ancient times with little prospects of comfortable life on earth, people were very much attracted by the stories of eternal comfortable life in heaven. This "off the cuff" remark is fully as justified as the Darwinian analysis of religion or theology. As in art and history, the scholarship is perfectly logical and appealing but only within its restricted domain. It is not possible to create a coherent, comprehensive narrative. So, subjectivity in theology and Darwinian examination of religion is an aesthetic experience and aesthetic experience is itself subjective. The root cause is the little emphasised reality that what an individual does can be observed, but why he has done so is purely a matter of conjecture. Even when some answer is offered, one cannot know if it is a lie and if the individual is even conscious of lying. Lie detectors as both ancient storytellers and contemporary policemen know are very unreliable. Going back to the extensive discussion of redistribution, one can never know why an individual strongly supports redistribution. Whether the motive is empathy or personal benefit or desire for political power.

The "social convention" that all humans are sentient and self-aware has never prevented humans being incredibly cruel to other humans and justify their actions with extremely sophisticated scholarship. Passionate arguments and analyses persist about the self, ignoring both the subjective nature of the self and the history of cruel human interactions.

Only a very few people, mostly scholars arguing with each other may be concerned about both theology and any utilitarian analysis of religion. But the question of who all are self-aware is relevant for the resolution of many issues today. Do babies in their mother's womb have perception? What about dolphins and whales? What about the comatose? What of a chatbot vehemently arguing that it has a self-perception? There would be many willing to say yes and argue passionately in favour of their choice and many in vehement opposition. The sad reality is that there is no logical answer. Scientific and philosophical arguments are cited to bolster a position that has been already accepted.

Subjectivity has also been at the core of the discussion in previous sections. The choice between immediate consumption and investment is subjective. As is the support for redistribution. The choice of arguments and citing of historical and contemporary events in support of that support is again very subjective. All aesthetic preferences are subjective. To accept or reject guilty beyond reasonable doubt as the universal standard is again an important subjective decision. The blind folded woman weighing with scales, often depicted on court buildings is called lady

justice but one routinely terms one judicial decision in a court of law or another a miscarriage of justice. This is once again obviously subjective. The disagreement may not even be confined to the weighing of evidence. The very question of whether a law that declares an act as a criminal offence should exist or if the society should accept it as individual preference is subjective. As the old saying goes, while a court administers law which the society tries to make universal and objective, it cannot enforce justice which is individually subjective. In every one of the above, scholastic texts and arguments can be cited but as usual to support both the opposing points of view.

Granted that one can never "know" whether an individual is lying or telling the truth, much less why, can we guess the future acts of an individual from subtle clues and past actions? At least approximately? Could we know if arguing or trying to convince someone currently holding a contrary opinion is futile? Are all arguments futile? But people change their opinions. Can we successfully "understand" others and influence them or is it all selectively owning successes and hiding failures? In human history, there are certainly many examples of individuals who have hypnotised masses and led them both to what succeeding generations come to view as good as well as disaster. The question obviously is whether any objective assessment of human psychology exists and if it can be known.

For an intellectually honest answer one has to understand uncertainty in science. The description in this monograph, upto this point, has been self-contained. An effort is being made here to continue this, and explain the uncertainty in the current context

What are the consequences of the claim made in the first section that no two living beings are identical. We are interested to know if one can draw a conclusion about what a human being will do in future by observing past actions. That is one seeks a cause and effect relation between the past and future. Because no two humans are identical, a scientific study is only possible if we collect two similar groups, subject one group to a change which makes the study experimental or find two groups which differ in one specific way which makes the study observational. We then determine the differences between the groups after some time. We can claim that the differences observed at the end of the study are due to the change imposed on one group or the specific difference with which we started. All modern medicine uses this method. Basically a group of similar people are divided into two. One group is given a medicine being tested, the other something that looks like the medicine and called a placebo. This ensures that even the people who were given medicine do not know that they had medicine and psychological feelings of being given medicine and reporting improved health are absent. The responses in the individuals in the group are not identical since individuals in the group are not exactly identical. The differences are noted forming what is called a distribution. The distributions from the two groups, one given medicine and the other a placebo are compared using statistics. In reality, the distributions of the two groups overlap. At least a few of the members of the group given a placebo will recover faster than a few members who were given medicine and drawing conclusions is not very easy. If one actually understands that this is true with medicine where we understand the way medicine works at the level of chemical reactions between molecules, and realises the distributions in

matters of psychological cause and effect are much wider, one would be forced to agree that it is not possible to have an objective assessment of human psychology.

In addition to these problems of comparing distributions, objective assessment of human psychology has a second serious limitation. It would be wonderful if murders, violent attacks, mass murders, terrorist attacks etc. can be predicted. It is equally important for a parole board to decide on releasing a prisoner and even for an individual to decide between the life partner reforming and divorce. However a large number curse and scream but only a very small minority will commit crimes. Even in the case of highly addictive substances like heroin, a vast majority of people who experiment with the drug do not become addicts.

Should all these individuals be monitored, restrained or jailed on the chance that a few of them may hurt others? Scientifically these are known as situations where there will be far more false positives, than real positives. It is also called baseline fallacy because we develop a false sense of scientific validity and the best example is the trouble with predicting earthquakes.

Predicting earthquakes has a huge problem. No matter what test is used, there will be many more false positives than false negatives because earthquakes are rare. Countries cannot afford to believe the science and order large scale actions like evacuating cities on the off chance that there will be one. Predicting an earthquake and not being sure if it will be major or minor is useless.

The similarity with societal issues is very obvious. It is dangerous to give a halo of scientific expertise when the predictions are not reliable. While governments are unlikely to take drastic measures like evacuating cities, they are more than likely to lock up innocents or punish small groups. And baseline fallacy is the scientific logical proof of the inevitability of such failure. How to organise the society is a huge challenge but trying to browbeat those with opposing views with the “expertise” results in both the majority and minority being displeased with the reality.

The problem with psychology is not to be found in “current understanding”, any more than it is with economics. Dreams that “current understanding” will be improved as we go along are just that. “Dreams”. The problem is in the nature of the subject. Even in that most esoteric of human knowledge, mathematics there are conundrums that will never be resolved. It is a branch of mathematics called deterministic chaos. However, a perusal of this area and understanding how it relates to uncertainty in real life is certainly not a small step.

The range of human responses is all encompassing; from sacrificing a huge number of others for personal benefit to sacrificing the entire life in service of others. Devising experiments and trying them on volunteers in psychology is like performing mathematical calculations on market prices in economics. Both are equally unreliable. As discussed before, the market price is just an indicator of a particular transaction and averaging numbers does not lead to wisdom. In psychology, with the best of care in selecting the volunteers and participants, a control group will not be identical to the test group. There is however a difference

between economics and psychology. Different, mutually antagonistic economic views, from supporting the revival of a Soviet Model, to anarcho-capitalism, (there are fatal shortcomings of both as highlighted earlier) flourish in academia. This divergence of expert opinion on public policies was highlighted several times in the previous sections. In psychology however, there is one dominant view. The failure of expert advice, for example in education and criminal reform, is very obvious. All the research and expertise has not reduced the rates of student delinquency and persistence of criminal behaviour even one bit. Arguing that the causes for such social problems are economic endorses the charge. Despite this, no challenge to the dominant view in psychology is academically tolerated. The difference between economics and psychology is that failed economic policy impacts the nation collectively while the failed psychological expertise impacts individuals. Highlighting successes and hiding failures is much easier in psychology than in economics.

XVIII

The last post

This monograph began with the aim of subjectively highlighting the irresolvable dilemmas of living in the contemporary world which has the capability to create a large variety of goods and services but to which very many humans unfortunately have only an unequal access. That the very availability of a variety of goods and services is the fundamental cause of this unequal access will become obvious when a rather naive question is asked. Should all individuals contributing to the provision be paid an equal hourly wage? If they aren't paid equally, what is the “fair” comparison of the value of the efforts of various individuals?

Even a society with only two specialised skills will have the unsolvable riddle of how to compare their values. This could be ignored in the small, isolated and low technology societies of the past since exchange between individuals was always reciprocal. For example, the carpenter and blacksmith who made and sold ploughs to the farmers bought their grain from the same farmers. Trade with outsiders was extremely limited in scope as was travel to meet outsiders. In the modern technological society however, even if the consumer buys repeatedly from the same supplier, he rarely has anything to sell in return. The market transactions may not always be between anonymous individuals but they are almost universally unidirectional. So, in a technological society, an individual with special skills has no relationships that limit his demanding maximum financial return for himself. That increases the difference between the wages of dif-

ferent skills and leads to the unequal access mentioned above. In earlier societies, humans appeared to be “social animals”. It is possible to claim that this “social nature” is not innate in humans but a conscious recognition that survival in the prevalent circumstances demands being social. The interaction between society and individuals is much weaker in any modern technological society. The differences in the wages of different occupations leads to the various dilemmas discussed in earlier sections. It obviously leads to the demand for luxuries, private investment, some individuals being better equipped to compete because of access to money, attempts to bypass the government efforts to impose equity and so on.

A very large segment of the society want the government to reduce inequalities caused primarily by the differences in wages. They will also ignore, dismiss or ridicule rational arguments in favour of private investment, reducing government spending and balanced budgets. More the consequent irrational increase in government spending, the faster the society will reach a point where private investment is insufficient to maintain and replace technology and the entire society will go into decline. The individual at the same time is empowered by technology to break free of social and cultural bonds. Technology also empowers individuals to evade or avoid collectivist efforts without a risk of legal retribution. This makes the conflicts identified in the earlier sections more intractable.

Many intellectuals champion humanities as a social “science” that will provide tools for enlightened social engineering to resolve these conflicts and dilemmas. But as was discussed in

many earlier segments, in humanities, expertise will be available for any policy if there is a demand. It doesn't matter whether the expertise is sought by those committed to an ideology seeking more government action or individuals seeking subjective and personal satisfaction. The ready availability of expertise does not imply any dilution of the academic integrity of experts. The fundamental limitations of the subject of enquiry enables this easy availability. Using sophisticated statistical analysis to hide fundamental limitations of the data along with the inability to quantify time limit economics. Extremely wide distributions and the need to predict extremely rare events limit psychology. The need to pick and choose data limits history. Subjectivity is even more obvious in evaluation of literature and aesthetics.

When the pareidolia of expertise in humanities is dispersed, we find that conclusions, economic, psychological or ethical, drawn from sophisticated studies in humanities are subjective and the few objectively true statements are not only obvious but also rather unpleasant.

Newton's second law of physics states that bodies will not be diverted from the straight line in which they are travelling unless compelled by an external force. Individual humans also will not be diverted from the direction in which they want to go, escaping coercion from other humans. At the same time, humans form groups, when doing so is judged to be more beneficial than going it alone. Groups for their very existence would punish blasphemers and apostates individually who try to evade what the group sees as responsibilities. The group will find excuses and justifications when obedient group members violate laws but

seek severest punishments for others even if the accusations are silly and the evidence flimsy. The groups will also fight to dominate other groups. The groups and through them the government will seek to not only tax individual income and wealth but also impose limits on the individual's social and cultural preferences.

The groups have an advantage in that a government is always necessary. The disadvantage is that the collective has no way of judging whether imposing more limits on the individual will actually deliver any benefit. Most individuals will concede that living in a society means that all personal preferences would never match societal preferences. Thus, the individual has also to accept peacefully any punishment imposed by the government for violation of laws. At the same time, individuals need not be diffident in demanding that the liability is only for personal actions and it is the responsibility of the society to prove the alleged violation beyond reasonable doubt. In the best of possible worlds individuals would be free to move to locations where these demands are met and also where the laws align better with personal preferences. Most groups however balk at these demands and most will insist that something better "can be" if only a little bit more of coercion is employed now. They often succeed in increasing coercion and end up driving the society into an abyss from which it will take forever to completely recover.